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ABSTRACT

The ABC television network's "Monday Night Football" (MNF) series is a very successful example of the symbiotic relationship between advertising, television, and sports. Assuming that the athletic contests are packaged as slick entertainment to draw both fans and nonfans to the real programing--the commercials--a study was organized to examine each broadcast of MNF during the 1979 football-broadcast season. Each game was analyzed in terms of the number of commercials per game, the amount of time per game devoted to sponsors, the distribution of the commercials throughout the game, and the types of products advertised. From this data the following composite of the typical MNF broadcast emerged: (1) Of the three hours devoted normally to each broadcast, more than one-sixth of the broadcast time, some 29 minutes, was devoted to advertising. (2) The placement of the commercials was fairly uniform from week to week, though the practice of lead-in advertising before kickoffs was discontinued late in the season. (3) Of the 64 commercials broadcast during each game, 16 were for automotive products; 12 were related to business concerns; 7 for audiovisual and electronic equipment; 5 for beer or wine; 2 each for personal products, food services, and public service announcements; and one for home related needs. (RL)

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MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL: SECOND DOWN AND A SIX PACK TO GO

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INTRODUCTION

Over the last ten years, on autumn Monday nights, sports fans in some 15 million American homes "tune in" the American Broadcasting television network to watch "Humble Howard," "the Giff," and "Danderoo" call the action for a National Football League (NFL) game. "Monday Night Football" (MNF) has become a "national institution" (Durslag, 1980:25) and as such, is a very successful example of the symbiotic relationship between advertising, television, and sports. During the three hour broadcast, the game is "interrupted" approximately every ten minutes so the network can play its own special game--commercials.

Viewers are told, often by celebrities, which car to buy, oil to use, beer to drink, and charity to support. Additionally, fans discover which shaving cream drives women wild, how to walk through airports, and "that $800 is not too much to spend on your child's education." The advertising game plan is so subtly well developed that the actual football game becomes secondary--little more than a "commercial for the commercials."

ABC-TV's commercial programming during the 1979 MNF season is the focus of this descriptive study. Each game is examined in terms of the number of commercials per game, the amount of time per game devoted to sponsors, the distribution of the commercials throughout the game, and the types of products advertised. From this data, a composite picture of the typical MNF advertising game plan emerges.

THE TRIUMVIRATE: ADVERTISING, TELEVISION AND SPORTS

According to Ewen (1976:19), advertising has become a tool of the social order for the creation of an "ideology of consumption." The function of advertising is to give the consumer materials and associations that s/he can

recollect under purchasing circumstances. An ad "should attach those meaningful associations that will be evoked by the stimulus of seeing the product in a store" (Schwartz, 1974:42).

Television is a fantastic medium for helping to make these meaningful associations. TV is primarily oriented to using programing as a way of drawing viewers to commercial messages. Thus media logic[1] (Altheide & Snow, 1979) implies that the program becomes little more than a commercial for the commercials.

Indeed, television and advertising are something of a "dynamic duo" (Mander, 1978:136). As Walter Lippman (in Baker, 1968:78) says, "While television is suppose to be 'free' it has in fact become the creature, the servant and indeed dependent on advertising monies for its survival." In fact, TV absorbs some 60% of all advertising expenditure (Mander, 1978:134).

Money from advertising is dependent on ratings. To generate a large viewing audience, television must fit viewer routines to TV and gear its advertising to fit each particular type of audience (Altheide & Snow, 1978: 73). Generally, they are successful. In a very short time, the average TV viewer will recognize a new advertising campaign and develop a response to specific lines or situations in the commercial. Thus, television is a perfect medium by which the commercials "burn into" the public's mind (Schwartz, 1974: 73). For as Goffman (1976:i) notes, "Advertisements depict for us not necessarily how we actually behave as men and women but how we <u>think</u> men and women behave." Television and advertising are mutually dependent and therefore symbiotic.

There is also a symbiotic relationship between sports and television (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1978:145). Audiences during sports programming are "TV

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[1] Media logic is defined as the process by which media present and transmit information (Altheide & Snow, 1979:10).

viewers," not just sports fans. In effect, TV has created a whole new game by attracting new fans (and higher ratings) through an entertainment veneer. The affinity between television and sports is based primarily on sports providing the drama necessary to maintain the interest of the television fan. According to Altheide and Snow (1979:218, 219):

> television dominates sports and the situation is no longer a local or regional phenomenon. . . . for sports the relevant media logic is entertainment through an ideal-norms format--the technical factions that require action, color, noise and a smooth transitional sequence of events and above all, commercial success.

Television depends on advertising for survival and sports depends on the media for support (see Altheide & Snow, 1978; Baker, 1968; Johnson, 1969). Television is the major source of income for some teams and advertisers pay, e.g. an average of $100,000 per minute for ads during professional football games (Craig, 1980:18). Thus, the interference in sports events to permit the profitable placement of commercials to fit into network schedules without replacing regular commercial programs is only logical. It's a "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours" situation.

Football is particularly suited to television (see Chandler, 1977 and Mander, 1978). TV made the public aware of football. To get viewer interest, one needs the qualities of good theatre. Football has this as it is patterned on a series of crises. In football, there are periodic opportunities within the normal course of a game for an announcer to "set the stage for the next dramatic situation, replay the last episode and get in the necessary commercials" (Snyder & Spreitzer, 1978:150). The rise of football superstars and sportscaster/entertainers, the use of instant replays, and the popularity of the NFL cheerleaders show how football is trying to fit into the entertainment veneer necessary to attract both fans and non-fans as TV viewers.

Football has even moved into prime time and MNF's high ratings indicate that sports can be successful in that slot. This is supportive of Altheide and Snow's (1978:190-1) statement that:

> Sports fits nicely into prime time, for it embodies almost every aspect of popular entertainment--Sports has controlled violence, problem solving, excitement, flamboyance, a fast pace, lots of color or visual power and the ideal norm of sportsmanship.

There have even been a series of rule changes in professional football to make the game fit into the entertainment venter. The overt purpose of the changes is to make the game safer and more exciting. The covert purpose is to get a larger viewing audience. These changes include delayed starting times, movement of the goal posts facilitating field goals and more last second victories (to keep the audience glued to the set), longer kickoffs and special teams for more exciting plays, penalties to benefit the offense and increase scores, and finally referee timeouts for commercials.

HYPOTHESES

The research was directed at exploring the following hypotheses. First, games vary little in length of broadcast time; therefore, each game has approximately the same proportion of time devoted to commercials. Second, commercial interruptions follow a placement pattern evidenced by roughly the same total number of ads per week and the similar number of commercial breaks in each quarter and halftime of every game. Finally, the products advertised primarily fall into categories of automotive products, alcohol and business concerns. The number of commercials in each product category does not significantly vary from week to week. These hypotheses were aimed at drawing

a composite picture of the Monday Night Football commercial game plan.

METHODOLOGY

Monday Night Football was selected for analysis for two reasons. Since MNF has the largest viewing audience of all televised professional football games, a fact advertisers are well aware of, it was considered the appropriate choice for initial analysis. Although the network has been broadcasting professional football games for only ten years, MNF has averaged a 34 share of the viewing audience over the past decade (Durslag, 1980:25). According to the World Almanac (1980), 20.1% of Monday night television viewers watched MNF in 1979 for a 36 share.[2]

MNF was also selected because ABC-TV broadcasts only one professional football game per evening. This means MNF will not "switch over to" a second game in the middle of the first quarter after a long first game, switch to another game in the final quarter because the early game has a lopsided score, or end the game abruptly for prime time programming (like the famous "Heidi" game[3]). Therefore each game can be seen in its entirity and thus the coding of all advertisements broadcast during each game is facilitated.

All commercials aired during the 1979 MNF season were analyzed. Thursday and Sunday night games were omitted except to substitute for Monday night

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[2]This slight decrease from 1978's 37 share is probably due to the fact that Sunday and Thursday night editions of MNF had mediocre ratings (Broadcasting, 1978:28). The high ratings of MNF may be due in part to the lack of sports competition on the other major networks on Monday nights, but not due to careful selection of games by ABC sports executives. THE MNF game schedule is determined by the NFL front office.

[3]This does not happen often today. The networks seem to have learned their lesson. Today commentators will probably say "'Sixty Minutes' (or "Walt Disney') will be seen in its entirity immediately following the game, except on the West coast where it will be seen at its regular time."

games which were invalidated due to equipment failure or network video problems. Commercials were defined to include all interruptions of the game for products, network spot announcements and public service announcements. A total of 1019 commercials were studied. These ads were examined in terms of the number per game, the time devoted to commercial announcements each game, and the distribution of the ads throughout the game. Commercials were also categorized by type of product advertised. Since network spot announcements averaged only about 15 seconds each and were so varied, they were omitted from this part of the analysis.

FINDINGS

The sixteen MNF games broadcast by ABC in 1979 were all approximately three hours long. Some 29 minutes of each game was devoted to commercial announcements and this was not significantly different for each game (see Table One). This confirms hypothesis one and means that more than one-sixth of the broadcast time (17.30%) was devoted to advertising.

(Table One Here)

The placement of the commercials was fairly uniform from week to week with one exception (see Table Two). For the first three-quarters of the season, the network had a lead-in announcement followed by two or three ads before the kickoff. This practice was dropped during the last quarter of the season and there were no commercial breaks prior to kickoff. The uniformity of the commercial patterning is noted in the fact that there is no significant difference in the number of commercials in each quarter and halftime in any of the sixteen games. Additionally, there was no significant difference in the total number of ads per game from week to week so hypothesis two is confirmed.

(Table Two Here)

Each commercial broadcast during the 1979 season was coded by product type into one of eleven general categories (see Table Three). Products having to do with automobiles such as new and used cars, tires, gas, and antifreeze were the most frequently appearing ads on MNF. Some 34% of the MNF commercials were related to automotive products.

(Table Three Here)

The next most frequently appearing category was business concerns. Some 25% of the commercials were for banks, credit cards, insurance or specific corporations like hotels or the phone company.

Surprisingly, alcohol ads were not as prevalent as hypothesized. Advertisements for beer and wine came in a weak fourth, after the audio-visual/electronics category. The network and advertising executives seem to assume that football fans are more interested in cameras, stereos, calculators, video games and computers than in drinking. Therefore, hypothesis three was only partially confirmed.

The other products generally advertised during MNF games were, in rank order, personal products such as clothing, toiletries, and tobacco; public service announcements (e.g. United Way); food, including grocery stores and restaurants; products for the home such as hardware and furnishings; ads for newspapers, magazines and movies; and government sponsored commercials such as for "Today's Action Army."

(Table Four Here)

Table four notes the number of commercials in each product category per game. While the rank order does occasionally change from week to week, there is no significant change in the number of commercials in each category per week.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Thus, a composite picture of the MNF commercial game plan emerges from this data. Sixty four commercials, totalling some 29 minutes of air time, will be broadcast during each game. Eleven commercials will be aired during the first quarter, 18 in the second quarter, six during halftime, 15 during the third quarter and 12 in the final quarter. Sixteen of the ads will be for automotive products, 12 ads will be related to business concerns, seven for audio-visual or electronic equipment, five for beer or wine, two each for personal products, food services and public service announcements, and one for home related needs. Sixteen network spots will be interwoven between these ads. Occasionally, if time permits, there may be additional ads for newspapers, magazines, movies or the government.

This picture of ABC-TV's advertising game plan shows just how much the "geography, economics, schedules, esthetics, and very ethos of sport" is dependent on TV cameras and advertising monies" (Johnson, 1969:86). Sports depends on television and television depends on advertising. The relationship between the three is so interwoven that it is extremely difficult to determine where one takes up and another leaves off.

Of the three, sports has probably given up more of its autonomy than the other two. However, the final decision on that statement is left for others to decide. One thing does seem obvious from this presentation: televison and advertisers must spend more time and money working out their elaborate game plan to draw Monday Night Football fans' attention to their commercials than any NFL team does in getting to the Super Bowl.

TABLE ONE: GAME AND COMMERCIAL TIME IN MINUTES

WEEK #	GAME TIME IN MINUTES	COMMERCIAL TIME IN MINUTES
1	196	29.67
2	157	29.00
3	163	28.17
4	181	28.33
5	186	29.83
6	168	28.17
7	168	29.25
8	161	28.58
9	176	27.83
10	166	28.33
11	201	27.92
12	171	28.50
13	180	28.84
14	190	28.92
15	186	28.42
16	175	29.50
MEAN	165.94 minutes (2.77 hours)	28.70 minutes

TABLE TWO: GAME COMMERCIALS BY QUARTER

WEEK #	BEFORE KICKOFF	FIRST QUARTER	SECOND QUARTER	HALF TIME	THIRD QUARTER	FOURTH QUARTER	TOTAL
1	3	10	20	5	13	16	67
2	3	9	20	5	15	10	62
3	3	13	12	5	15	13	61
4	3	13	14	5	18	10	63
5	3	12	16	6	15	10	62
6	3	14	17	5	15	11	65
7	3	12	19	6	15	12	67
8	3	13	17	6	13	12	64
9	0	14	16	7	15	11	63
10	2	11	19	6	12	12	62
11	3	11	16	6	14	11	61
12	0	11	22	6	15	10	64
13	0	11	19	7	14	12	63
14	0	7	26	7	16	11	67
15	0	9	20	8	14	13	64
16	0	13	18	7	14	12	64
Total	29	183	291	97	233	186	1019
Mean	1.82	11.44	18.19	6.06	14.56	11.62	63.69

TABLE THREE: NUMBER OF COMMERCIALS BY PRODUCT CATEGORY

PRODUCT CATEGORY	TOTAL ALL GAMES	PERCENTAGE ALL COMMERCIALS	PERCENTAGE WITHOUT NETWORK SPOTS
AUTOMOTIVE	254	24.93%	33.55%
BUSINESS CONCERNS	193	18.94%	25.50%
AUDIO-VISUAL/ ELECTRONICS	110	10.79%	14.53%
ALCOHOL	80	7.85%	10.57%
PERSONAL PRODUCTS	35	3.43%	4.62%
PUBLIC SERVICE	27	2.65%	3.57%
FOOD	27	2.65%	3.57%
HOME	19	1.86%	2.51%
NEWS/MAGS/ MOVIES	7	0.69%	0.92%
GOV'T	5	0.49%	0.66%
Total	757		100.00%
NETWORK SPOTS	262	25.71%	
Total	1019	100.00%	

TABLE FOUR: COMMERCIALS BY PRODUCT CATEGORY AND WEEK

WEEK#	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	MEAN/WK	TOTAL
PRODUCT CATEGORY																		
AUTOMOTIVE	19	23	14	16	14	17	17	18	17	15	15	13	15	15	13	14	15.86	254
BUSINESS	13	10	14	14	15	13	15	15	8	12	15	12	12	8	8	9	12.06	193
A-V/ELECTRONIC	3	4	6	6	5	6	6	5	7	7	6	10	7	10	12	10	6.86	110
ALCOHOL	6	6	7	5	5	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	4	7	5	5	5.00	80
PERSONAL PRODUCTS	2	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	5	2	2	2	4	4	4	4	2.19	35
PUBLIC SERVICE	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	3	2	4	1.68	27
FOOD	1	1	4	3	1	4	1	1	0	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	1.68	27
HOME	2	1	0	1	1	3	1	1	1	2	0	1	1	1	1	2	1.27	19
NEWS/MAGS/MOVIES	1	0	0	1	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.44	7
GOVERNMENT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0.31	5
TOTAL	49	47	48	47	43	51	48	47	45	47	45	48	46	50	47	49	47.31	757
MEAN/CATEGORY	4.9	4.7	4.8	4.7	4.3	5.1	4.8	4.7	4.5	4.7	4.5	4.8	4.6	5.0	4.7	4.9		
NETWORK SPOTS	18	15	13	16	19	14	19	17	18	15	16	16	17	17	17	15	16.38	262
TOTAL	67	62	61	63	62	65	67	64	63	62	61	64	63	67	64	64	63.69	1019
MEAN/CATEGORY	6.1	5.6	5.5	5.7	5.6	5.9	6.1	5.8	5.7	5.6	5.5	5.8	5.7	6.1	5.8	5.8		

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